The

Gheranda Samhita

The Original Sanskrit

and

An English Translation

James Mallinson

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Loretta made this whole deal possible.

For Sri Ram Balak Das Ji Yogiraj

Contents

Introduction

THE BOOK you are about to read, a manual of Yoga taught by Gheranda to Chanda, is the most encyclopedic of all the root texts of Hatha Yoga. At the beginning of the book, Chanda asks Gheranda to tell him about the Yoga of the body, which is the cause of knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Gheranda assents and the book is thus called the *Gheranda Samhita*, or "The Collection [of Verses] of Gheranda."

It sets itself apart from other books on Hatha Yoga in two notable ways. Firstly, it calls its Yoga "ghata Yoga" or "ghatastha Yoga" and not Hatha Yoga. The usual meaning of ghata is "pot," but here it refers to the body, or rather the person, since the techniques taught by Gheranda work on both the body and the mind. Secondly, it is unique in teaching a sevenfold path to perfection of the person. A few Hatha Yoga texts replicate Patanjali's classical description of Yoga as ashtanga, or "eight limbed," but there are numerous other classifications. For example, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*'s four chapters correspond to the four stages of its Yoga, while the *Goraksha Samhita*, echoing several earlier Tantric texts, describes its Yoga as six limbed.

The seven chapters correspond to the seven means of perfecting the person. Each chapter teaches a group of techniques that, when mastered, will lead to one of the seven means listed in verse 1.9. The first chapter describes six types of cleansing techniques by which purification, the first means to perfecting the person, can be achieved. The second chapter describes thirty-two asanas by which strength, the second means, is attained. In the third chapter Gheranda teaches twenty-five mudras, which lead to steadiness, the third means. The fourth chapter describes five techniques for pratyahara, which brings about calmness, the fourth means. The fifth chapter starts with instructions on where the yogi should live, what he or she should eat, and at what time of year yogic practice should be started. It then lists ten kinds of pranayama, the practice of which leads to lightness, the fifth means. The sixth chapter describes three types of dhyana, using which the yogi can achieve realization of the self, the sixth means. Finally, in the seventh chapter, Gheranda teaches six types of samadhi, which lead to abstraction, the ultimate means of perfecting the person.[1]

Like the other root texts of Hatha Yoga, the *Gheranda Samhita* does not concern itself with yama and niyama, the restraints and observances that make up the first two limbs of classical Yoga. It is unique in devoting an entire chapter

[1]In verse 7.6, it is said that Raja Yoga is of six types. Many commentators equate Raja Yoga with the classical Yoga of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, but in texts on Hatha Yoga it means samadhi, rather than a separate type of Yoga.

to bodily purification and in the number of purificatory practices it describes. The chapters on asanas and mudras are similarly unparalleled in the number of practices taught. The difference between asanas and mudras is not made clear by Gheranda—several of the mudras seem to be no more than asanas. We are told in the first chapter that asanas lead to strength and mudras to steadiness. In other texts, however, the purpose of mudras is said to be the awakening of Kundalini. In five of the twenty-five mudras listed this aim is made explicit, but awakening of the Goddess is also given as one of the fruits of pranayama in verse 5.57.

A further unique aspect of this book lies in its positioning of the chapter on pratyahara before that on pranayama. In the classical system, the last six limbs are successively more subtle, moving from the physical realm to the mental. Pranayama is, of course, a more physical practice than pratyahara, but here the Bhramari pranayama is said to lead to samadhi; indeed, it is one of the six varieties of Raja Yoga or samadhi given in the final chapter. This may account for the position of the chapter on pranayama. Most of the rest of the chapter is similar to other texts, apart from the teaching of the Ajapa Gayatri, the mantra constantly but involuntarily repeated by all living beings. The sounds of the in- and outbreaths are said to be *sa* and *ham*, whose implicit combination is the Vedantic dictum *so'ham*, "I am that."

The chapter on dhyana teaches three successively more subtle visualizations, starting with a gross dhyana of the yogi's guru on a beautiful island, followed by a luminous dhyana, visualization of a light between the eyebrows, and a

subtle dhyana, visualization of Kundalini. In the final chapter Gheranda teaches six very different ways to samadhi. Three mudras, Shambhavi, Khechari, and Yoni, lead to three types of samadhi: dhyana, bliss through rasa ("taste" or "sensation"), and laya (resorption into the Ultimate Reality by means of Kundalini's rise up the Sushumna, or central channel). Bhramari pranayama, as noted above, leads to samadhi through nada, the inner sound. The Murccha, or "trance" pranayama also leads to samadhi. Finally, we are told that samadhi can arise through bhakti, "devotion," and this is another feature that sets this book apart from all other texts on Hatha Yoga.

Nothing is known about Gheranda and Chanda. The name Gheranda is not found anywhere else in Sanskrit literature. Like many other works on Hatha Yoga, the work is framed as a dialogue, suggesting that it has been overheard and then written down. Thus the identity of the author (or whoever overheard Gheranda) is not revealed. Chanda's full name, Chandakapali, means "fierce skullbearer." The epithet kapali, "skullbearer," immediately brings to mind the sect of the Kapalikas, skull-bearing followers of Shiva infamous for antinomian practices. Kapali and Kapalika are both mentioned as past masters of Hatha Yoga in the list given in verses 1.4-8 of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. (In fact, some manuscripts of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* prefix the name Kapali with Chanda, rather than Khanda, the more common reading.) However, as we shall see below, the practices taught in this book are tame compared to some of those taught in other works on Hatha Yoga, and Gheranda

appears to have been a follower of Vishnu, so we cannot claim Kapalika origins for the text. Perhaps Chanda's epithet is simply a way of establishing a connection between the text and the lineage of the Mahasiddhas mentioned in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

There are also no records of the place and date of composition of the text, but there are indications that it is a relatively late work on Hatha Yoga from northeast India. The majority of its manuscripts are found in the north and east of India, and, of those which are dated, the oldest was copied in Bengal in 1802 C.E. As far as I am aware, it was never cited by medieval commentators in their works on Hatha Yoga. Doctrinal discontinuities also set it apart from the rest of the Hatha Yogic corpus. Tantric influences have been toned down considerably. See, for example, the description of Vajrolimudra in verse 3.39: in all other manuals of Hatha Yoga this name is given to a technique in which the yogi or yogini resorbs commingled sexual fluids through the urethra; here it is a simple physical posture. The author attributes the teachings of Hatha Yoga to Shiva, but verses 5.77 and 7.18 suggest that he was a devotee of Vishnu. Furthermore, several verses indicate that the text was compiled by a vedantin, in particular verse 7.4: "I am Brahman and nothing else. I am Brahman alone and do not suffer. My form is truth, consciousness, and bliss. I am eternally free. I abide in my own nature."[2]

[2]Despite the author's sectarian affiliation, he has no particular doctrinal axe to grind and often tells the aspiring yogi to fill in the details of his visualizations and practices in the manner instructed by his guru.

The early texts of Hatha Yoga showed no trace of Vedanta; their doctrinal framework was Tantric. As Hatha Yoga and its proponents, the Nathas, gained in popularity and patronage, the religious orthodox, amongst whom Vedanta had become the predominant ideology, had to sit up and take notice. As they had done with other heterodox movements that threatened their hegemony (e.g., renunciation and vegetarianism) they claimed Hatha Yoga as their own. This process culminated in the eighteenth century with the compilation of several new Upanishads and the rewriting of some older ones; these are now known collectively as the Yoga Upanishads. The unknown compiler(s) used verses from established works on Hatha Yoga to create the texts. The Vedantic and Vaishnava leanings in this book, combined with its use of verses from established works on Hatha Yoga, suggest that it probably resulted from a similar process. In the light of this, as well as the fact that errors in the manuscript of 1802 C.E. imply an established manuscript tradition, the absence of citations in seventeenth-century commentaries, and the location of most of its manuscripts in Bengal, we may hazard a guess that the *Gheranda Samhita* was composed in Bengal around 1700 C.E.

The Sanskrit text presented here is based on the edition of Swami Digambarji and Dr. M. L. Gharote, first published at Lonavala, Maharashtra, in 1978, for which they collated fourteen manuscripts and five printed books, including the Adyar Library edition of 1933, which formed the foundation of their edition. The best known edition of the text is that of Chandra Vasu, which was first published in 1915. It was

based on two earlier Bengali editions which appear to have relied on a very small number of manuscripts. The Adyar Library edition is much more thorough and omits several spurious verses found in Vasu's edition. I consulted three manuscripts (two in the library in Jodhpur's Mehrangarh Fort and one in the Bodleian Library, Oxford) that were not collated for the Lonavala edition, but they were very similar to manuscripts that had been used so I decided that there was no point in editing the text myself. I have made emendations or adopted alternative readings in a few places, but in general the text is the same as the Lonavala edition.[3] The Sanskrit is of the variety that medieval commentators on Tantric and Yogic works generously called "aisha," which literally means "coming from Shiva." In other words, it is often ungrammatical.

Some verses have been borrowed from other works, in particular the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and the *Goraksha Samhita*. The section on the five dharanas (elemental visualizations) in verses 3.59-63 sheds light on the text's composition and development. It has clearly been taken directly from the *Goraksha Samhita*, verses 155-59, but is incoherent and ungrammatical in all the *Gheranda Samhita* manuscripts. In the *Goraksha Samhita* each element has a

[3]These critical editions are mentioned in the introduction and footnotes. The first work has been referred to as the *Goraksha Samhita*.

Nowotny, Fausta. Das Gorakṣaśataka. Dokumente der Geistesgeschichte 3. Köln: K. A. Nowotny, 1976.

Digambarji, Swami, and Dr. M. L. Gharote, eds. Gheraṇḍsaṃhitā. Lonāvalā: Kaivalyadhāma Śrīman Mādhav Yoga Mandir Samiti, 1978.

Mallik, Kalyani. The Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati and Other Works of Nātha Yogīs. Poona: Oriental Book House, 1954.

color, a shape, a location in the body, and a mantra, but these are confused and omitted in the *Gheranda Samhita*. In verse 3.62, for example, the wind element is said to be black, smoky, and white, while in the *Goraksha Samhita* it is just black. I have somewhat boldly decided to adopt the readings of the *Goraksha Samhita* for the entire passage. That all the *Gheranda Samhita* manuscripts present a similarly incoherent description of the dharanas is surprising and points to two possible scenarios. Either they are descended from a single flawed manuscript or the compiler of the *Gheranda Samhita* was using a flawed manuscript of the *Goraksha Samhita* to write the text. The first hypothesis requires a lengthy and improbably irregular manuscript tradition predating the earliest extant manuscript, which, in the absence of external evidence for the text's existence prior to 1802 C.E., is unlikely. I am thus inclined to believe the second hypothesis.

In translating, I have tried to be as literal as possible without sacrificing readability. I have sought not to add anything to what is found in the Sanskrit text—commentary and elucidation are for the practitioner's guru. Thus where the instructions for a practice are ambiguous, they have been left that way. The photographs of the asanas and mudras draw from the descriptions in the text. In a few instances those descriptions do not provide all the information necessary to be sure of the correct posture. For those cases I have relied on current practice and common sense to fill in the gaps.

तृतीयोपदेशः

Chapter Three

Mudras

महामुद्रा नभोमुद्रा उड्डीयानं जलन्धरम् ।
मूलबन्धो महाबन्धो महावेधश्च खेचरी ॥ 1
विपरीतकरी योनिर्वज्रोली शक्तिचालनी ।
ताडागी माण्डुकीमुद्रा शाम्भवी पञ्चधारणा ॥ 2
अश्विनी पाशिनी काकी मातङ्गी च भुजंगिनी ।
पञ्चविंशतिमुद्राश्च सिद्धिदा इह योगिनाम् ॥ 3

Mahamudra, Nabhomudra, Uddiyana, Jalandhara, Mulabandha, Mahabandha, Mahavedha, and Khechari; Viparitakarani, Yoni, Vajroli, Shaktichalani, Tadagi, Mandukimudra, Shambhavi, the five dharanas, Ashvini, Pashini, Kaki, Matangi, and Bhujangini: these twenty-five mudras grant success in this world to yogis.

पायुमूलं वामगुल्फे संपीड्य दृढयत्नतः ।
याम्यपादं प्रसार्याथ करोपात्तपदाङ्गुलिः ॥ 4
कण्ठसंकोचनं कृत्वा भ्रुवोर्मध्ये निरीक्षयेत् ।
पूरकैर्वायुं संपूर्य महामुद्रा निगद्यते ॥ 5

Firmly press the anus onto the left ankle, extend the right foot, hold the toes with the hands, contract the throat, and look between the eyebrows. Inhaling repeatedly, fill yourself completely with air. This is called Mahamudra.

वलितं पलितं चैव जरामृत्युं निवारयेत् ।
क्षयकासगुदावर्तप्लीहाजीर्णज्वरं तथा ।
नाशयेत्सर्वरोगांश्च महामुद्राप्रसाधनात् ॥ 6

It can cure wrinkles and gray hair, old age and death, consumptive cough, constipation, disorders of the spleen, decrepitude, and fever. By mastering Mahamudra, the yogi can get rid of all diseases.

यत्र यत्र स्थितो योगी सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा ।
ऊर्ध्वजिह्वः स्थिरो भूत्वा धारयेत्पवनं सदा ।
नभोमुद्रा भवेदेषा योगिनां रोगनाशिनी ॥ 7

Wherever the yogi may be, he should always, in everything he does, be sure to keep the tongue turned upwards and constantly hold the breath. This is Nabhomudra, the destroyer of diseases for yogis.

उदरे पश्चिमं तानं नाभेरूर्ध्वं तु कारयेत् ।
उड्डीनं कुरुते यस्मादविश्रान्तं महाखगः ।
उड्डीयानं त्वसौ बन्धो मृत्युमातंगकेसरी ॥ 8

Draw the abdomen backwards above the navel so that the great bird flies unceasingly upwards. This is Uddiyana-bandha, a lion against the elephant of death.

समग्राद्बन्धनाद्ध्येतदुड्डीयानं विशिष्यते ।
उड्डीयाने समभ्यस्ते मुक्तिः स्वाभाविकी भवेत् ॥ 9

This Uddiyana sets itself apart from all bandhas: when Uddiyana is practiced, liberation arises spontaneously.

कण्ठसंकोचनं कृत्वा चिबुकं हृदये न्यसेत् ।
जालन्धरे कृते बन्धे षोडशाधारबन्धनम् ।
जालन्धरमहामुद्रा मृत्योश्च क्षयकारिणी ॥ 10

Contract the throat and put the chin on the chest. When Jalandharabandha is performed, the sixteen adharas are restrained.[1] The great Jalandhara mudra brings about death's downfall.

सिद्धो जालन्धरो बन्धो योगिनां सिद्धिदायकः ।
षण्मासमभ्यसेद्यो हि स सिद्धो नात्र संशयः ॥ 11

A perfected Jalandharabandha bestows success upon yogis. He who practices it for six months is an adept. In this there is no doubt.

[1]A bandha (lock) is a type of mudra. The sixteen adharas (literally "supports" or "substrates") are at various locations within the body. They are listed in the *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, verses 2.10–25.



महामुद्रा – Mahamudra



उड्डीयानबन्ध – Uddiyanabandha



जालन्धरबन्ध & मूलबन्ध – Jalandharabandha & Mulabandha

पार्ष्णिना वामपादस्य योनिमाकुञ्चयेत्ततः ।
नाभिग्रन्थिं मेरुदण्डे सुधीः संपीड्य यत्नतः ॥ 12

The wise yogi should apply pressure to the perineum with the heel of the left foot and carefully push the navel plexus against the spine.

मेढ्रं दक्षिणगुल्फेन दृढबन्धं समाचरेत् ।
जराविनाशिनी मुद्रा मूलबन्धो निगद्यते ॥ 13

He should tightly press the penis with the right heel. This mudra destroys decrepitude and is called Mulabandha.

वामपादस्य गुल्फेन पायुमूलं निरोधयेत् ।
दक्षपादेन तद्गुल्फं संपीड्य यत्नतः सुधीः ॥ 14

With the ankle of his left foot the wise yogi should block the anus, and with the right foot he should carefully press down on the left ankle.

शनकैश्चालयेत्पार्ष्णिं योनिमाकुञ्चयेच्छनैः ।
जालन्धरे धारयेत्प्राणं महाबन्धो निगद्यते ॥ 15

He should slowly move his heel about, gently contract the perineum, and hold the breath in Jalandharabandha. This is called Mahabandha.

महाबन्धः परो बन्धो जरामरणनाशनः ।

प्रसादादस्य बन्धस्य साधयेत्सर्ववाञ्छितम् ॥ 16

Mahabandha is a great bandha: it destroys decrepitude and death, and by its grace the yogi can achieve whatever he wants.

रूपयौवनलावण्यं नारीणां पुरुषं विना ।
मूलबन्धमहाबन्धौ महावेधं विना तथा ॥ 17

Mulabandha and Mahabandha without Mahavedha are like the beauty, youth, and charm of a woman without a man.

महाबन्धं समासाद्य चरेदुड्डानकुम्भकं ।
महावेधः समाख्यातो योगिनां सिद्धिदायकः ॥ 18

Assume Mahabandha and hold the breath while applying Uddiyanabandha. This is called Mahavedha. It bestows success upon yogis.

महाबन्धमूलबन्धौ महावेधसमन्वितौ ।
प्रत्यहं कुरुते यस्तु स योगी योगवित्तमः ॥ 19

The yogi who every day practices Mahabandha and Mulabandha combined with Mahavedha is the best of Yoga experts.

न मृत्युतो भयं तस्य न जरा तस्य विद्यते ।
गोपनीयः प्रयत्नेन वेधोऽयं योगिपुंगवैः ॥ 20

He has no fear of death and does not become decrepit. This Mahavedha is to be kept secret by the masters of Yoga.

जिह्वाधोनाडीं संछित्य रसनां चालयेत्सदा ।
दोहयेन्नवनीतेन लौहयन्त्रेण कर्षयेत् ॥ 21

The yogi should regularly cut the tendon below the tongue and move the tongue about. He should milk it with fresh butter and pull it with iron tongs.

एवं नित्यं समभ्यासाल्लम्बिका दीर्घतां व्रजेत् ।
यावद्गच्छेद्भ्रुवोर्मध्ये तदा सिध्यति खेचरी ॥ 22

By regular practice in this way, the tongue becomes long. When it reaches between the eyebrows, Khechari is perfected.

रसनां तालुमूले तु शनैः शनैः प्रवेशयेत् ।
कपालकुहरे जिह्वा प्रविष्टा विपरीतगा ।
भ्रुवोर्मध्ये गता दृष्टिर्मुद्रा भवति खेचरी ॥ 23

Gently insert the tongue into the base of the palate. When the tongue is turned back into the cavity of the skull and the gaze is directed between the eyebrows, that is Khecharimudra.

न च मूर्च्छा क्षुधा तृष्णा नैवालस्यं प्रजायते ।
न च रोगो जरा मृत्युर्देवदेहः स जायते ॥ 24

Loss of consciousness, hunger, thirst, sloth, sickness, decrepitude, and death do not arise, and the yogi obtains the body of a god.

न चाग्निर्दहते गात्रं न शोषयति मारुतः ।
न देहं क्लेदयन्त्यापो दशेन्न च भुजङ्गमः ॥ 25

Fire does not burn the body, the winds do not dry it out, water does not wet it, and a snake cannot bite it.

लावण्यं च भवेद्गात्रे समाधिर्जायते ध्रुवम् ।
कपालवक्त्रसंयोगे रसना रसमाप्नुयात् ॥ 26

The body becomes beautiful and samadhi is sure to arise. When it comes into contact with the aperture of the skull, the tongue reaches a liquid.

नानारससमुद्भूतमानन्दं च दिने दिने ।
आदौ च लवणं क्षारं ततस्तिक्तकषायकम् ॥ 27
नवनीतं घृतं क्षीरं दधितक्रमधूनि च ।
द्राक्षारसं च पीयूषं जायते रसनोदकम् ॥ 28

Each day a blissful sensation arises from the various flavors. At first the fluid on the tongue is salty and brackish, then bitter and sharp, then like fresh butter, ghee, milk, curd, buttermilk, honey, grape juice, and nectar.

नाभिमूले वसेत्सूर्यस्तालुमूले च चन्द्रमाः ।

अमृतं ग्रसते सूर्यस्ततो मृत्युवशो नरः ॥ 29

The sun dwells at the root of the navel, and the moon at the root of the palate. The sun consumes the nectar of immortality and thus man is held in the sway of death.

ऊर्ध्वं च योजयेत्सूर्यं चन्द्रं चाप्यध आनयेत् ।
विपरीतकरी मुद्रा सर्वतन्त्रेषु गोपिता ॥ 30

Put the sun up and bring the moon down. This Viparitakarani mudra is concealed in all the tantras.

भूमौ शिरश्च संस्थाप्य करयुग्मं समाहितः ।
ऊर्ध्वपादः स्थिरो भूत्वा विपरीतकरी मता ॥ 31

Carefully place the head and both hands on the ground, raise the feet, and remain steady. This is considered to be Viparitakarani.



विपरीतकरणी – Viparitakarani

Contributors

JAMES MALLINSON is a graduate of Eton and Oxford, holds a master's from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and returned to Oxford University for his doctorate. He has also spent years in India, living amongst the yogis.

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SANTOSHA VANESSA BOUCHARD, the woman in the photographs, is a lifelong practitioner of Yoga. She inspires her students through her love of Yoga. Michael L. Rixson has been a professional photographer since 1983 and a practitioner of Yoga since 1997.

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"The yogi should visualize a sublime ocean of nectar in his heart, with an island of jewels in its middle whose sand is made of gemstones. In every direction there are kadamba trees with abundant flowers. Bees and cuckoos buzz and call there. He should steady himself and visualize a great jeweled pavilion..."

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